

We must ensure that our railroads can operate in ways that allow them to maximize their growth and earn a sufficient rate of return. Our shippers and the businesses that supply the rail industry need dependable, economically sound carriers to transport their goods and to buy their products. Rail employees need a safe, fair and efficient system in which to work. These are mutually interdependent objectives, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to achieve sound policy determinations that satisfy these objectives. ●

AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION
HEALTH ADVOCATES OF THE
YEAR

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate Dr. Samuel R. Dismond Jr. and HealthPlus of Michigan for their strong commitment to health, education and the well-being of the Genesee Valley area.

Dr. Dismond is the current chief of staff at Hurley Medical Center. Throughout his distinguished medical career, he has served on a number of influential boards. Dr. Dismond has also been recognized numerous times for his contributions to the medical profession. By supporting his community and actively promoting research in health related fields, Dr. Dismond has made a difference in a number of patient's and associate's lives.

HealthPlus of Michigan has worked tirelessly to promote lung health within their organization and their community, including efforts to help any willing employee or patient quit smoking. This was accomplished by offering various smoking cessation and behavioral support programs. However, the biggest step HealthPlus has taken was instituting guidelines requiring every physician affiliated with HealthPlus to inquire about his or her patient's smoking status during each visit and to track it within their permanent medical records. Also, the physician must encourage every smoker to attempt to stop smoking. HealthPlus has also donated money to the American Lung Association so that they might help to teach area children about asthma.

It is with great pleasure that I announce to the U.S. Senate Dr. Samuel R. Dismond as the recipient of this year's American Lung Association "1998 Individual Health Advocate of the Year" and HealthPlus as the "1998 Corporate Health Advocate of the Year." These awards will be presented at the 16th annual Health Advocate of the Year Awards Dinner on March 18, 1999 in Grand Blanc, Michigan. I extend my sincerest congratulations to Dr. Dismond and HealthPlus of Michigan. ●

THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-
FAIRS

● Mr. ROCKEFELLER. This week marks the 10th anniversary of the De-

partment of Veterans Affairs, which elevated the Veterans Administration (previously an independent federal agency) to cabinet-level status. This move capped the gradual evolution of a governmental response to the needs of veterans—beginning with the Plymouth colony's first pension law in 1636, and proceeding through a variety of federal bureaus with shared responsibility for ministering to veterans, before those agencies were unified into one.

The creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs has both a real and a symbolic meaning. By raising the agency to cabinet level, the Nation's chief veterans' advocate—the Secretary of Veterans Affairs—was literally given a seat at the table with all other major executive agencies, and direct access to the President. Symbolically, veterans were accorded "a voice at the highest level of government," in the words of former VA Secretary Jesse Brown. This is as it should be for the second largest agency of the federal government, whose sole mission is to serve those whose sacrifices are the very backbone of the freedoms we all enjoy.

As current VA Secretary Togo D. West, Jr., has said, "Cabinet status has brought many benefits; but it has also brought increased obligations." The VA plays a major role nationally in the fields of health care, education, insurance, and housing. As the Nation's budget is divided up, it is important that VA be on a level playing field with other federal departments to effectively safeguard our veterans' interests.

I want to take this opportunity to salute the many talented, caring, and dedicated employees of the Department who are at the heart of its operations. I know they labor under a heavy workload, particularly in this era of tightening budgets. We must ensure they have the resources they need to carry out their mission.

The Department's 10th anniversary marks a happy milestone, a decade of growth and accomplishments. My warmest congratulations to all who share in this achievement. ●

GREAT LAKES CHAMBER MUSIC
FESTIVAL TRIBUTE

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, a dynamic organization which has made an incredible contribution to Michigan's culture. The Chamber's concerts have really left their imprint on our State, with some twenty concerts in and near Detroit each year, many of which occur in the venues of the Festival's sponsors—St. Hugo of the Hills Catholic Church, Temple Beth El, and Kirk in the Hills. Additional concert locations range from the Detroit Zoo to the Detroit Institute of Arts. The Festival is administered by Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings, which performs a number of the concerts. But today, I

would like to take a moment to officially welcome the Chamber to our nation's capital for what is expected to be a stellar performance in the Library of Congress on Friday evening.

The Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival was born in 1994. The Festival is sponsored by three religious institutions, representing Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant faiths, and Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings, a prominent chamber music ensemble.

Pianist James Tocco has been Artistic Director of the Festival since its inception. A native Detroitier, Mr. Tocco has brought a rotating contingent of world-class musicians to the Festival, creating an event of national significance. The list of performers reads like a long "Who's who" in chamber music, including Ruth Laredo, Peter Oundjian, Paul Katz, Miriam Fried, Gilbert, Kalish, Philip Setzer, the St. Lawrence Quartet, Peter Wiley, Ida and Ani Kavafian, and others. The Festival provides a major educational initiative to assist ensembles emerging to professional stature. Entitled the Shouse Institute, this program brings groups from throughout the world to Detroit for performances and coachings by Festival artists. These young artists attend the Festival tuition-free and receive complimentary lodging.

So in welcoming the Great Lakes Chamber Festival to Washington, D.C., and thanking all of those from the Chamber that made this possible, I also would like to single out Gwen and Evan Weiner, dear friends of our family who introduced the Chamber to me and who have played a critical role in enhancing cultural life in Michigan, as well as Harriet Rotter, another close friend who has contributed a great deal of time and energy to this effort. Gwen, Evan, Harriet, and the many others who are involved with the Chamber Festival are sterling examples of community leadership at its best, and I am pleased they are here today. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the hard and dedicated work of Maury Okun, the Chamber Festival's Executive Director, an invaluable member of the Chamber Festival team.

Again, I want to commend all those involved in making The Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival a tremendous success, and extend my warmest wishes and best of luck for the concert Friday night and in the future. ●

DOUG SWINGLEY'S WINNING OF
THE ALASKAN IDITAROD SLED
DOG RACE

● Mr. BURNS. I rise today to bring attention to Doug Swingley's second victory in the Alaskan Iditarod. Doug hails from Simms, Montana, where he raises and trains his dogs.

As you all know, the Alaskan Iditarod is a grueling dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska. The race covers 1,161 miles and is run in some of the harshest weather in the world.

Doug Swingley began mushing in 1989 with plans of running the Iditarod. He ran his first Iditarod in 1992 and was the top-placing rookie that year. He has competed in every Iditarod race since 1992 and won the event for the first time in only his third attempt. I am sure that Doug's second victory will disappoint my good friends Senators STEVENS and MURKOWSKI, because Doug is the only non-Alaskan to win the Iditarod. He has proven that a kid from Montana can take on our friends from the North and beat them at their own game and win.

Like his first victory, Doug pulled his team away from the competition, and showed incredible speed through the final stages of this demanding race. I am impressed by his dedication and hard work, and I am proud to know that Montana is full of people like Doug. ●

EDUCATION FLEXIBILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT

● Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, as the primary sponsor of S. 280, the Education Flexibility Partnership Act (Ed-Flex), I am pleased that the Senate passed this legislation by a 98 to 1 margin on March 11, 1999. In addition, the House of Representatives passed the companion bill on the same day by a vote of 330 to 90. This bicameral, bipartisan support for Ed-Flex is a positive first step for education reform in the 106th Congress.

This first step in education reform is desperately needed. Critics of our education system note that the federal government provides only seven percent of funds in education, but requires 50 percent of the paperwork. In addition, more often than not, well-intentioned federal programs come with stringent regulations and directives which tie the hands of school officials and teachers. As the Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee's Task Force on Education, I have heard the pleas from states and localities for greater flexibility in administering federal programs in exchange for increased accountability. This theme has been echoed as I travel around Tennessee visiting schools and holding education roundtable discussions for teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, school board officials, and other interested members of the community.

The First Ed-Flex bill passed by Congress will provide greater flexibility coupled with increased accountability for our nation's schools. Specifically, this bill will allow every state the option to participate in the enormously popular Ed-Flex demonstration program already in place in twelve states. The twelve state currently participating in the program are: Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Vermont.

Ed-Flex frees responsible states from the burden of unnecessary, time-con-

suming federal regulations, so long as states are complying with certain core federal principles, such as civil rights, and so long as states are making progress toward improving their students' performance. Under the Ed-Flex program, the Department of Education delegates to the states its power to grant individual school districts temporary waivers from certain federal requirements that interfere with state and local efforts to improve education. To be eligible, a state must waive its own regulations on schools. It must also hold schools accountable for results by setting academic standards and measuring student performance. Using this accountability system, states are required to monitor the performance of local education agencies and schools that have received waivers, including the performance of students affected by these waivers. At any time, either the state or the Secretary of Education can terminate a waiver.

The twelve states that currently participate in Ed-Flex have used this flexibility to allow school districts innovate and better use federal resources to improve students outcomes. For instance, the Phelps Luck Elementary School in Howard County, Maryland used its waiver to provide one-on-one tutoring for reading students who have the greatest need in grade 1-5. They also used their waiver to lower the average student/teacher ratio in mathematics and reading from 25/1 to 12/1.

A Texas statewide waiver to allow more flexible use of Federal teacher training funds has allowed districts to better direct professional development dollars to those areas where they are needed most. In Massachusetts, a school that had been eligible for Title I funding in the past was ineligible for the 1997-98 school year, but was expected to be eligible again for 1998-99. Massachusetts was able to use Ed-Flex waiver authority to give the school a one-year waiver and assure continuity of service rather than disrupt services for a year.

Support for Ed-Flex is broad. The President has called for Ed-Flex expansion, as well as others including the Secretary of Education, the National Governors' Association, the Democratic Governors' Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Education Association, and the National School Boards Association.

Ed-Flex is a move in the right direction. We must empower States and localities by giving them the flexibility they need to best combine Federal resources with State and local reform efforts. I am pleased that the 106th Congress has acted quickly on my bill to ensure that every State will have the opportunity to participate in this successful program. Ed-Flex is a commonsense, bipartisan plan that will give States and localities the flexibility that they need while holding them accountable for producing results.

Now, the challenge for this Congress is to build on Ed-Flex's themes: flexi-

bility and accountability. As we consider the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act later this year, we must continue the push to cut red tape and remove overly-prescriptive Federal mandates on Federal education funding. At the same time, we must hold States and local schools accountable for increasing student achievement. Flexibility, combined with accountability, must be our objective. The end result of our reform effort must spark innovation—innovation designed to provide all students a world-class education. ●

TRADE FAIRNESS ACT OF 1999

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise to cosponsor S. 261, the Trade Fairness Act of 1999. I believe this legislation is crucial to our attempts to save American jobs from unfair competition and dumping.

Specifically, Mr. President, we must implement this legislation to protect our steelworkers from imports dumped into our domestic markets by our Russian, Asian and Brazilian competitors.

American steelworkers have proven that they are our nation's backbone. They provide the materials on which our shipping, manufacturing, indeed our entire industrial base rely. In my state's Upper Peninsula two mines, the Tilden and the Empire, employ almost 2,000 Michiganians. Last year the workers in these mines produced over 15 million tons of iron ore pellets. They paid \$8 million in taxes. Time and again they have stood up for America, and it is time for America to stand up for them.

We must stand up for these hard working men and women, Mr. President, because they face a very real threat to their livelihoods. Let me cite a few numbers. By October of last year Japan had already doubled its imports to the United States from the year before. Just in that month of October, Japan sent 882,000 tons of steel to the United States, an all-time record. Finally, in that month alone 4.1 million net tons of steel were imported to the United States.

The reasons for this steep increase in imports are threefold. First, the Federal Reserve's longstanding tight money policy produced actual deflation in commodity prices, deflation from which our steel industry has yet to recover. Second, the Asian, Russian and Brazilian economic crises are forcing those countries to rely on exports to keep their economies afloat. The U.S. is the world's biggest market, and so they have targeted us. Third, the International Monetary Fund convinced these countries to raise interest rates and devalue currencies, which allowed their steel to undercut our prices.

Combined, these factors have encouraged the unfair trade practice of dumping, selling steel in the United States at prices below the cost of production. This practice threatens disastrous consequences for our steelworkers and for